Frequently Asked Questions



What is a Neighborhood?

A neighborhood is a collection of elements such as houses, streets, parks, stores and schools. However, the real importance of a neighborhood is that it is made up of people...neighbors.

What is Neighborhood Planning?

Neighborhood planning is a type of planning that allows every-day citizens an opportunity to play an active role in developing a vision for the future and action steps to make that dream a reality. Neighborhood planning efforts were first made visible with the 1920s development of Radburn, New Jersey. Since then, more than 50 communities in more than 22 states have implemented neighborhood planning programs. The neighborhood planning process involves local stakeholders, city departments, community organizations and institutions working together. The goal of neighborhood planning is to promote mutual responsibility and joint problem solving.



Why Should I Plan for My neighborhood?

Neighborhoods are the basic building blocks of the community. Strong, involved, caring neighborhoods are the foundation of exceptional communities. The stability and long-term viability of your neighborhood begins with your involvement in the planning process.

A plan can help a neighborhood by:

- Providing a vision and guidance for neighborhood desires
- ° Providing direction to the City regarding programs, services and capital improvements.
- Informing business interests on needed services and their appropriate site locations
- ° Collecting ideas about an area in a central place
- Providing a tool that can be shared with new residents and potential investors.

What is the Role of Neighborhood Businesses in Neighborhood Planning?

Neighborhood businesses should be invited to participate in the planning process because they, like residents, contribute to your community by supporting its local tax base. Neighborhood businesses are key components in any neighborhood's overall quality of life. They also can provide one of the most informed perspectives on your neighborhood's economic welfare.



What Are Collaborative Partnerships?

Collaborative partnerships are teams that are used to improve the health of a community. They encourage people to get together and make a difference. For example, an effort to improve education in your community might involve school officials, teachers, business persons, youth, and older adults. Because these partnerships bring people together from all parts of the community, their variety of expertise often leads successful partnerships. When establishing collaborative partnerships, try to include all potential stakeholders so that consensus can be reached, and objections to the plan are minimal.



Who Should be Involved in My Neighborhood's Collaborative Planning Partnership?

Again, it is important that your neighborhood's planning collaboration be as inclusive as possible. The Community Building and Neighborhood Planning (CBNP) Program identifies the importance of developing prioritized action strategies to address current issues between neighborhoods and community partners. Key partners in a broad planning collaboration include:

- Local members of community partnerships, neighborhood organizations and those who are working to change their communities.
- Local, regional and statewide organizations, that provide technical assistance for community partnerships.
 For example, partnerships with colleges could link classroom and student resources through studio plan-

- ning classes that help neighborhoods address their issues. Or, a partnership with your local independent school district could focus on sharing recreational and building facilities as well as planning the location of new schools within your neighborhood.
- Intermediary organizations that can help assess partnership needs and provide them with support. For example, state and county health departments can assist community groups by developing health data systems that provide county-level data.
- Grant makers and governmental agencies that are important members in collaborative partnerships.
 Foundations and governmental agencies can help create the conditions for community partnerships to be successful, by providing financial resources needed by partnerships and intermediary organizations.

As your neighborhood begins to forge its collaborative partnerships, some may begin to question why "outsiders" (those who do not reside in the area), should be invited to play a part in the planning process. It is important to remember that neighborhood planning blends the local and the universal, the particular and the broader contexts. Such efforts are grounded locally: the family, the neighborhood, and other familiar communities. However, to be effective, diverse groups of people and organizations must be brought together to transform the broader conditions that affect local work. This requires courage, doubt, and faith: the courage to trust those outside your neighborhood's immediate experience, the doubt to question what is, and the faith to believe that together you can make a difference.



Why Register Your Neighborhood Association

Registering your Neighborhood Association with the City can:

 Provide the contact information needed for the City's Case Managers to send notices about pending zoning cases before the Zoning Commission, amendments before the Planning Commission, and demolitions before the Historic Design Review Commission to any registered neighborhood association whose boundaries fall within 200 feet of the property being considered;

- Help guide and unify your community efforts to improve your neighborhood;
- Facilitate participation with the Police Department's SAFFE/COP programs;
- Help develop working relationships with the City of San Antonio; and
- Improve communication with other public agencies, the private sector, and nonprofit organizations.



How Will I Know if My Neighborhood Needs a Goals and Strategies Report or a Neighborhood Plan?

Your neighborhood's organizational level will determine whether you should create a Goals and Strategies Report or a Neighborhood Plan. Neighborhoods that are not organized should try goal setting first. Goal setting can help your neighborhood identify its preferences, direction, and aspirations. In the process, goal setting will help your neighborhood organize itself around common ideas, goals, and sentiments and can be created in as few as two meetings. If, however, your neighborhood is already at this stage, plan writing may be a more feasible place to begin.



How Much Dedication Does the Neighborhood Planning Process Require?

The vision and leadership for neighborhood planning must come from the community. Plans are best implemented when a community can claim ownership in the proposed initiatives. The creation and implementation of a Neighborhood Plan is not a simple undertaking. The planning process is usually a year long, labor-intensive and time-consuming en-

deavor. Not only will you spend time collecting data about your neighborhood, but you will spend another several months, if not longer, deciding how to use that information to create and implement the action steps set forth in your Neighborhood Plan. In light of this, the neighborhood planning process should be entered into only by individuals who are serious about improving their communities.



How Can Neighborhood Planning Benefit My Area?

Even though a tremendous amount of work is involved in the neighborhood planning process, taking the time and effort to produce a sound Neighborhood Plan will result in numerous advantages for your neighborhood and the people who live, work, and play there. The most significant of these advantages include:

- Ensuring short range problem-solving as well as long-term health and viability for your community by allowing it to plan proactively for its future
- Uniting your neighborhood's business leaders and residents in a collective cause
- Establishing an avenue for the citizenry to shape neighborhood improvement and growth, including social, economic and physical growth.
- Focusing on positive outcomes, rather than allowing a continuing discussion of neighborhood hurdles.
- Demonstrating to the community-at-large and, more importantly, to the City, that your neighborhood has both the desire and capability to reach its goals.
- Providing direction to the City in the form of services, programs, and improvements appropriate for your community.
- Demonstrating to business investors the types of enterprise needed by your community's residents and subsequently, what development types should be promoted.



How Can I Tell if My Community is in Need of Neighborhood Planning Efforts?

Most neighborhoods, no matter how peaceful, stable, or pleasant they seem, can benefit from the creation of a Goals and Strategies Report or a Neighborhood or Community Plan. They product can help begin the revitalization process for a neighborhood which is starting to decline or help a healthy neighborhood stay healthy. However, neighborhood planning efforts will be most beneficial to neighborhoods that need to address critical issues at present or in the near future. Such issues include:

- the existence of traffic problems
- the need for more housing price diversity
- persistent crime and insecurity among residents
- the need for local job creation and economic development
- the need for mass transit service improvement
- mismatches between zoning and actual land use
- the need for neighborhood linkage devices such as bike paths and sidewalks
- the environmental, residential, or historical qualities of a neighborhood is threatened



How Can My Neighborhood Foster Local Involvement in the Creation of its Goals and Strategies Report or Neighborhood Plan?

Neighborhood stakeholders, not the Planning Department, authors its own Goals and Strategies Report or Neighborhood Plan, therefore, it is very important that all community members, including residents, merchants, community groups, and affiliated stakeholders, participate in the planning process at some level. Community members will take ownership in and strive to implement a Goals and Strategies Report or Neighborhood/Community Plan truly if they are both invited and encouraged to play a direct role in its creation and implementation.

How can your neighborhood organization make certain that community members are given the opportunity to play an active role in the neighborhood planning process?

One way to accomplish this goal to ensure that your neighborhood organization makes a steadfast effort to publicize the ongoing planning process as well as the need for local participation. While conducting the planning process, it is important to host several neighborhood workshops, meetings, and hearings so that everyone who desires has a chance to participate. Also, give each person in your neighborhood an opportunity to respond to the final draft of the Goals and Strategies Report or Neighborhood Plan. In addition, the local Chambers of Commerce should be contacted to request the input of its business members; the private sector is just as vital to your neighborhood's health and viability as is the public sector. The viewpoints and collaborative efforts of all groups are important to your Goals and Strategies Report or Neighborhood Plan. Involve as many persons as possible in the planning process, so that successful collaborative partnerships can be fostered.